

nowadays is likely to read the "Géométrie" in the original, unless he is studying or writing on the history of mathematics, and wants to understand the exact stage of development represented by that work?—for no one would think of going to it for the technique of modern analytical geometry. As Prof. Loria has remarked, there is a greater gulf between Descartes' work and a modern treatise on analytical geometry than there is between an ancient (*i.e.* Greek) and a modern treatise on any other mathematical subject.

If the book is read from the historical point of view, the reader will certainly want much help in the way of notes showing the relation between Descartes' methods and those of other writers, ancient and modern. Such aids are all the more necessary with a book which is in any case difficult to read, because the author himself purposely left many things obscure or only half explained. There was a reason for this in the general attitude of the mathematicians of the time to one another. Every one wanted to get personal credit for discoveries, and to avoid giving anything away which another could use and then claim as a discovery of his own. So far does Descartes betray this anxiety that he even hints at things which he has not set down but could 'an if he would.' "I hope," he says, "that posterity will give me credit, not only for those things which I have explained, but also for those which I have voluntarily omitted in order to leave them the pleasure of discovering them," as if he wished 'to have it both ways'!

On the whole, the reprint before us seems rather to fall between two stools, unless indeed it is merely intended as a handy book of reference for those who, studying an account of Descartes' work in an ordinary history, wish to look up some particular point in the original. T. L. H.

Our Bookshelf.

Rasa-Jala-Nidhi: or Ocean of Indian Chemistry and Alchemy. Compiled in Sanskrit by Rasacharya Kaviraj Bhudeb Mookerji. With English translation by the Author. Vol. 1. Pp. v + xv + viii + 350 + v. Vol. 2. Pp. ii + 5 + 8 + 10 + 296 + 23. (Calcutta: The Author, 41A Grey Street, n.d.) 10 rupees.

THE author says that he has been a devout student of early Indian chemistry from his boyhood. By accident, he came into contact with a Yogi from whom he learnt much more than could be found in the existing books on Indian chemistry, which he considers to be incomplete, incoherent, incorrect, and in many cases misleading. The Yogi's teaching, however, enabled him to arrange methodically the materials found in the existing books on early

chemistry, which were mostly in a chaotic state, and had been neglected for several centuries past. Unfortunately, the author gives no list of authorities for his facts and recipes, though he promises one for the concluding volume (the tenth); it is therefore impossible to assess the work properly from a historical viewpoint. Since, however, he maintains that Rasavidya, or chemistry, was cultivated by the early Aryas some 1950 million years ago, and states that fragments of two or three books written about 898,000 B.C. are still in existence, his claims to be treated as a serious historian are perhaps not very weighty. Mr. Mookerji dismisses Sir P. C. Ray's work on Hindu chemistry as that of an amateur critic, and says that it contains many misinterpretations of important principles, due to a hasty and superficial study of the subject.

It appears that the author is the principal of a college of medical chemistry, as testimonials of cures are given at the end of the first volume. Whether the remedies described in the book are those employed in practice by Mr. Mookerji does not seem clear, but if so, the Indian constitution must be remarkably resilient. Among other bizarre recipes we read that "essence of earth-worms is cool, and cures all sorts of carbuncles and leprosy," besides imparting to mercury the property of withstanding the heat of fire.

The 'chemistry' is equally startling—"mercury is in a state of swoon, when it succeeds in curing diseases without producing any after-effect. The processes of causing swoon of mercury, as known to the expert chemists, are many; of all these, heating with six times its weight of sulphur is the best of all."

It is not improbable that much of the material which the book contains may be of some antiquity, and it is to be hoped that the author will fulfil his promise of adducing his authorities. Until he does so, his book must serve merely to throw into relief the unscientific nature of a queer folk-pharmacology. E. J. H.

Mushrooms and Toadstools: an Account of the more common Edible and Poisonous Fungi of Canada. By H. T. Güssow and W. S. Odell. Pp. 274 (128 plates). (Ottawa: Division of Botany, Dominion Experimental Farms, 1927.) 1 dollar.

THE outstanding feature of this book is its price—one dollar! For a large, well-bound volume of 274 thick leaded pages, with 128 plates containing hundreds of unusually good photographs of fungi, two of these plates being in most delicate colouring, a price of one dollar is literally startling. The book is published by direction of the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, and if this is a sample of his direction, one can only fervently wish more power to his elbow. The volume is really an extended bulletin of the Division of Botany of the Dominion Experimental Farms, the senior author being the Dominion botanist. It contains simple but adequate descriptions of the common edible and poisonous fungi of Canada, and although it is far from complete, few if any of what may be